



Focal Point

Construction Safety



Creating safe work environment takes planning

Deb Hilmerson says good planning on a construction project can prevent injuries and save time and money.

BY JIM MARTYKA

SPECIAL TO CONSTRUCTION TUESDAY

It's one of the oldest "laws" of construction: When you start a project, you are already behind schedule.

"We're always behind the eight ball in that as soon as we start, we already feel the pressure," said Deb Hilmerson, president and CEO of Prior Lake-based Hilmerson Services. "It's always been a problem in our industry, and it always will be a problem in our industry. We are constantly working against the clock. So when an accident occurs or an issue arises, that can really cause a problem."

That is why planning is so crucial to the overall success of a project. Hilmerson, who has spent years preaching workplace safety and accident prevention, will offer advice on project planning during a session at Construction Safety Day.

The key to planning, she said, is to do it in stages.

"These projects vary in size, but each one is a huge task for any construction company, so project planning needs to be done for each phase," Hilmerson said. "Break it down. It not only makes it easier to develop a plan, but it will help you be more prepared."

Hilmerson discusses breaking down pre-project planning in three phases. The first is pre-construction planning. Here is where the construction company gets familiar with the area and with similar types of projects and buildings. The firm should make sure it has all the right tools and personnel for the job. Such details as checking for medical facilities in the area and having medical personnel available are also important.

The second step is called pre-phase planning. In this stage, the company should break down the project into pieces and evaluate the potential dangers and hazards in each. This means looking at the risks at each stage of the project individually. Essentially, the planning for electrical work will differ from the planning for exterior construction.

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small ones," Hilmerson said.

The final step, dubbed pre-task, is where the company sets up schedules, the right personnel and the details of what's needed to complete each task in the most efficient, cost-effective and safest way.

Experts say that pre-project planning can have a major impact on not just the overall safety of a project, but also on efficiency. According to the Construction Industry Institute, pre-project planning reduces project costs by as much as 20 percent.

Pre-project planning, though, ultimately comes down to the company itself. It can be a daunting task, full of processes, meetings and operational reviews. So it's important that management not only be committed, but also be intimately involved in the process, Hilmerson said.

That means assigning personnel who can work on pre-project planning with attorneys and project managers and later share the information with everybody from management to the people digging the holes and pouring the concrete.

"The company needs to be involved and committed," Hilmerson said. "It can be a lot of work. But I see too many companies that simply react when a problem occurs, and that's a mess. Pre-project planning helps avoid that."



Deb Hilmerson, president and CEO of Hilmerson Services based in Prior Lake, will discuss project planning during a session at Construction Safety Day on Thursday. Hilmerson says pre-project planning should be done in stages. "Break it down," she says. "It not only makes it easier to develop a plan, but it will help you be more prepared." Hilmerson has spent years preaching workplace safety and accident prevention. She says you can break down pre-project planning in three phases: the first is pre-construction planning; the second step is pre-phase planning; and the final step is called pre-task. According to the Construction Industry Institute, pre-project planning reduces project costs by as much as 20 percent. (Contributed photo)



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